

Good morning Senator Beth Bye and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Tammy Exum. I volunteer in an elected political position as Vice- Chairperson of the West Hartford Board of Education. I also coordinate the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) in our town. However, the role I most value is being the mother of three boys who have attended WHPS, and currently range from elementary school to the high schools.

I chose to live in West Hartford because of the quality of education provided to the students in our community. Over the years, I have partnered in various ways with the schools to help supplement and advocate for resources. However, parents and volunteers can only do so much. While our school district continues to offer quality programming and services, I am deeply concerned that we are at a critical point, and without increased funding of our Educational Cost Sharing funds, vital programs and services that our public school students deserve, may be impacted.

Like many districts around the state, my town of West Hartford relies on local property taxes for the vast majority of its school budget. For too long the town has not received its fair share of Education Cost Sharing funding. As West Hartford's population has changed and demands on our schools have increased, ECS funding has not increased appropriately.

West Hartford services approximately 10,000 students. Almost 2,000 students, representing 20% of our student body, come from non-English language dominant homes. With over 70 different languages spoken, today our district has 39% or 3,859 minority students. 21% of all our students are on free and reduced lunch and over a thousand students from preK-12 receive special education services, representing 11% of our student population.

The ECS formula has remained largely stagnant for over a decade and no longer reflects the demographic realities in West Hartford and other towns. The funding gap needs to be remedied to give all our children access to the best education possible.

West Hartford has seen the largest shortfall: \$301.8 million over 19 years and a \$31.9 million shortfall in 2014-15 alone, the 3rd largest shortfall of any town in ECS funding.

When the gap is measured on a per pupil basis, West Hartford has the largest gap, by far, of any town in Connecticut. The 2014-15 gap of \$31.9 million converts to a loss of \$3,015 per student. The town has not received the full amount owed to it by the ECS formula since the 1995-96 school year.

While I appreciate the attention needed to bolster Charter and Magnet Schools, our public schools are the backbone of our educational system. Our public schools both require and deserve the appropriate funding to support student needs.

I encourage you to continue to be national leaders in education by supporting our public schools that add so much to our communities and state as a whole. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tammy Exum

Vice-Chairperson, West Hartford Board of Education

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